



Encountering “What ifs” on the Expressway of Life

Bible Study
Leader’s Guide

[Please provide: copies of this Bible study, Bibles, hymnals, and musical accompaniment]

Sing: “Consider How the Birds Above,” LSB # 736

Prayer: Dear Lord God, heavenly Father, guide us today as we study Your Word. Prepare our hearts and minds to acknowledge the sins of worry and anxiety and to come to You for forgiveness. By the power of the Holy Spirit, refresh us in the study of Your Word as You lead us to look to You and to Your care for us. Give each of us guidance to turn our cares over to You as we trust in the Good News of our salvation. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Expressways allow motor vehicles to move quickly from one place to another. But “what if” excessive amounts of merging vehicles, roadblocks, accidents, vehicle breakdowns, and other unexpected issues occur? These events can limit or even stop the normal flow of traffic.

Our fast paced lives can be compared to an expressway. As we merge onto the expressway of life, any number of “what ifs” can occur that limit or stop our plans. What if as you plan your wedding, your future spouse’s deployment halfway around the world is extended? What if as you prepare for the birth of your child, the doctors indicate there are complications? What if as you prepare to leave for college on a scholarship, you wonder if you can study, work, make friends, and keep your grades up? What are some “what ifs” that you face today? Encourage participants to share one or two “what ifs” they currently face.

In every life, there are always “what ifs.” Your personal “what ifs” might include such life-changing events as a move to a new community due to a job change, a change in marital status due to divorce or the death of a spouse, or a retirement after many years of hard work. Then there are the daily “what ifs” as you care for your family, go to work, shop for groceries, take the car in for repairs, mow the lawn, plant a garden, shovel snow, visit your doctor, as well as medical diagnoses and procedures which frighten us. These are just the tip of the iceberg of our busy lives and the “what ifs” that affect us.

When “what ifs” on the expressway of life overwhelm us, we may become worried and anxious. As our sinful natures cause us to turn inward to look for answers, we may wonder if we will have time to accomplish everything ahead of us in our daily lives. We may wonder if a relationship will develop or dissolve. We may wonder if the medical advice and procedures will grant us a cure. Worry and anxiety over “what ifs” and over actual problems we face can consume our time and energy. These emotions may become so overwhelming that they cause us to take our eyes off of God and cause us to forget His love and care for us as well as His control over all things.

To help us face life’s “what ifs,” let’s turn to God’s Word for guidance.

Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble (Matthew 6:34a).

What does this key verse mean to you as you encounter worry and anxiety on the expressway of life? This verse encourages us to look to God for what we need. As we trust in Him to give us “our daily bread,” He helps us not to worry about the future.

Some Natural, Physical, And Relationship Roadblocks That Can Cause Worry And Anxiety

There are many roadblocks and breakdowns on the expressway of life that can cause us to be anxious and worried. Read the verses listed below. Identify the cause of anxiety described in each one as either natural, physical, or interpersonal (relationship-based).

2 Samuel 6:16: interpersonal (the breakdown of marriages)

2 Samuel 15:13–14: interpersonal (dysfunction among family members)

2 Kings 6:15: interpersonal on a large scale (wars)

Mark 5:21–24, 35: physical (illness and physical death)

Luke 2:46–48: interpersonal (between parents and children)

Luke 8:22–25: natural (storms, floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes, and the like)

Luke 12:22–26: physical (concerning physical needs)

Romans 16:17: interpersonal (among members within a church family)

Which of the events above make you worried and anxious? Encourage participants to share.

How do your worry and anxiety levels change when such events happen not to you but to your loved ones? As participants share, discuss how hurt and often helpless we feel when our loved ones are suffering. It is especially worrisome and stressful when we live far from loved ones who are experiencing difficulties because we are unable to be physically with them.

How Do Worry And Anxiety Affect Us?

Read the verses below. What physical or mental effect of worry and anxiety on us does each one describe?

Proverbs 12:25a: Overwhelming worry and anxiety is the opposite of trusting in God. It makes us feel weighed down, physically, mentally, and spiritually.

Ecclesiastes 2:22–23: Worry and anxiety fill our hearts with sorrow and make our work a hardship instead of a joy. Worry and anxiety can make us sleepless which in turn can affect our physical and mental health.

Luke 21:34: Worry and anxiety can physically and mentally wear us down and can lead us to indulge in other excessive behavior (dissipation and drunkenness) which are detrimental to physical, emotional, and mental health.

When have you experienced these same effects? Encourage willing participants to share times worry and anxiety has affected them in the ways described above.

How did you deal with these effects? Participants' answers may range from God-pleasing ones such as prayer and reading Bible passages showing God's strength and His comfort to those that are not: more worry, increased fear, agitation, overeating, or drinking in excess.

Read 1 Kings 19:1–4. What very real threat did the prophet Elijah face which made him extremely worried and anxious? King Ahab's wife, Jezebel, wanted Elijah killed.

What did this extreme worry and anxiety lead Elijah to want? Elijah wanted to die.

Read 1 Kings 19:5–21. God did not leave Elijah alone. How did God help him? Twice God sent an angel to Elijah to bring him food and water for strength. God Himself spoke to Elijah to strengthen and encourage him through His Word. God gave Elisha to Elijah to be his helper.

Fixing Our Focus On God As We Travel The Expressway Of Life

Initially, where was Elijah's focus? Initially, Elijah's focus was on the danger he was in and how he could escape this danger.

What happens when we turn our focus inward to ourselves and not upward to God? When our focus is turned inward, our worries become larger than life and cause us to forget God's work in our lives and His guidance.

Read Jeremiah 17:5-8. How do these verses describe the difference between trust in ourselves or in other people and trust in God? When we trust in ourselves or other people we displease God. We are cursed, dried up, and parched. When we trust in God we are blessed and fruitful. When we look upward to God, He comforts us and leads us away from anxiety. He gives us His peace. He reminds us that through faith in Jesus who has conquered sin and death for us, that we are His and that He guards and protects us.

The following Scripture references provide welcoming exits for us when the "what ifs" on life's expressway overwhelm us. Read each reference and write down God's directions for us when worry and anxiety fill our hearts and minds.

Psalms 34:4–6: God answers our prayers and saves us from our fears and troubles.

Matthew 6:25–34: We do not need to be anxious for if God takes care of birds, how much more will He take care of us.

2 Corinthians 1:8–10: God works through troubles in our lives to draw us closer to Him. Through Christ, we are raised from death. We can trust that He will deliver us.

Philippians 4:5b–7: God is with us. He commands us: *do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to [Him]* (v. 6). *God's peace will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus* (v. 7), who is our refuge and strength.

1 Peter 5:7: God invites us to give our cares to Him. We can trust that He will help us because, in love, He sent Jesus to rescue us from sin and from every evil.

Read Psalm 46. Write down three phrases found in this psalm that tell of God's control over all the "what ifs" of this world. Phrases participants mention may include, *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear if the earth gives way (vv.1-2a); God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns (v. 5); The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress (vv. 7, 11); He makes wars cease to the end of the earth (v. 9a); "Be still, and know that I am God" (v. 10a).*

Briefly tell about a time when remembering God's almighty power helped you as you faced worry and anxiety. Encourage participants to share.

Name something specific that you can take from this study that will help you as you deal with the "what ifs" on the expressway of life. Encourage participants to share.

Closing Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, through Your Son's death and resurrection, our salvation is won. Jesus has defeated sin, death, and the devil. Through faith in You, we receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life. As our sinful nature struggles with concerns, worries, and anxieties, guide us into Your loving arms and the grace that abounds beyond measure. May the Holy Spirit teach us to bring all the cares that burden and weigh us down to Your feet and leave them there. May we have Your peace as we know and trust that You alone have the power to rescue and save us. In the blessed and holy name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

Sing: "Entrust Your Days and Burdens," LSB 754, LW 427

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